

# All-Day Breakfasts Are Heating Up In Family-Style Restaurants

Breakfast items are top of the menu for diners of all ages, whatever time of day they're eaten

By Julie Bennett

**M**other was right: breakfast is the most important meal of the day.

That's especially true for franchisees of family-style restaurants. Their breakfast sales have risen ever since a global fast-food hamburger chain rolled out an all-day breakfast in Oct., 2015.

Wade Breaux, the chief marketing officer for Perkins Restaurants in Memphis, Tenn., says, "When fast-food chains expanded their breakfast game, it had an immediate adverse impact on our sales. People were trying it, but they came back to the family dining experience quickly." Perkins, with 400 locations, 270 of them franchises, began as a pancake house in 1958 and has served breakfast all day ever since. Mr. Breaux says that 60% of its lunchtime guests now order breakfast, as do 40% of people coming in for dinner.

## SALES INCREASED

Nationally, restaurant orders for breakfast continue to increase, says Bonnie Riggs, restaurant industry analyst in the Rosemont, Ill., office of NPD Group Inc., a consumer research firm headquartered in Port Washington, N.Y. While orders for other restaurant meals are shrinking, breakfast sales increased 3% in 2016,



DENNY'S

Left: Denny's pancakes are popular all day long; right: Golden Corral's breakfast burritos reflect a growing trend.



GOLDEN CORRAL

Ms. Riggs says, and are still strong this year. Taking all family-style restaurants together, 73% of breakfasts are eaten in the morning, 13% for lunch, 13% for dinner and 1% for snacks, she says.

Instead of stealing market share from family-style eateries, the heavy advertising that fast-food chains used to promote their all-day breakfasts "heightened awareness" among consumers that breakfast might be a good alternative for lunch or dinner, says Ms. Riggs.

Part of breakfast's popularity is driven by lifestyle changes, says John Gordon, principal and founder of the Pacific Management Consulting Group in San Diego, Calif. "People's work patterns have changed," Mr. Gordon says. "People who work from home may want breakfast when it's convenient for them. Many young kids have body clocks that are hours

behind the rest of us, but they want breakfast when they do get up. And breakfast generally has a lower ticket than an average lunch or dinner, making it attractive for seniors."

"Breakfast satisfies a very specific craving for baby boomers," says Darren Tristano, an advisor to Technomic, a food industry research firm in Chicago. "For years, we were told that eggs are bad for us, now that they are good for us again, we have a desire to eat them throughout the day."

## "I THINK EVERYONE LIKES BREAKFAST, REGARDLESS OF THE TIME OF DAY."

When the National Restaurant Association listed consumers' top 10 perennial favorites in its "2017 Culinary Forecast," breakfast items French toast

and bacon held spots 2 and 3. The same report cites breakfast burritos or tacos and lumberjack breakfasts among eight trends "heating up" this year.

## BRUNCH DEMAND

So many people want breakfast all day that family buffet chain Golden Corral changed its format and hours to accommodate them. Shelley Wolford, vice president of national marketing and media for the 487-unit chain (433 franchises) in Raleigh, N.C., says, "We saw

increased demand for breakfast, so this May we launched our 7-day brunch." Traditionally, Golden Corral restaurants served breakfast on Saturdays and Sundays and opened at 11 a.m. on weekdays for lunch. Today, all Golden Corral restaurants open at 10 a.m. on Monday through Friday and serve classic breakfast items like scrambled eggs, custom-made omelettes,

carved ham and buttermilk pancakes on their luncheon buffets until 2 p.m. daily. If the demand for breakfast continues into dinnertime, franchisees have the option of keeping brunch items on their buffets, Ms. Wolford says. She adds, "Daily brunch is very popular with families with children and our senior following. Another upside is that food costs are lower for breakfast items than other commodities."

Like Perkins, all of the 1,700 Denny's restaurants (90% franchisee-owned) have served breakfast any time since the Spartanburg, S.C., chain was founded in 1953. Franchisee Sam Wilensky, who owns six Denny's in Northwest Florida and Mississippi, and also serves as the chairman of the board for Denny's franchisee association, says, "We did see a slight drop in traffic when fast-food chains introduced breakfast all day, but they bounced back after a couple of weeks."

Mr. Wilensky says, "I love walking through my stores and speaking with guests. Often I'll see someone enjoying all-you-can-eat pancakes at dinner, while others at the same table are eating steaks or burgers. I think everyone likes breakfast, regardless of the time of day." Julie Bennett is a freelance writer and author specializing in franchising.